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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CARACAS 003518

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SUBJECT: CORRECTED COPY: STATE OF VENEZUELAN ELECTORAL
OBSERVATION EFFORTS

REF: A. CARACAS 03494

 B. CARACAS 03506

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Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT R. DOWNES FOR 1.4 (D)

¶1. (C) Summary. The electoral observation missions (EOMs) have missed most of the key "lead-up" events in the electoral preparation process and have had to scale back previously planned activities. It will be very difficult for them to mount a comprehensive observation effort. In effect, they will be basing conclusions on an incomplete, cursory snapshot of the very end of the presidential campaign. In total, we expect there will be approximately 225 international accredited observers, and approximately 800 accredited domestic observers. End Summary.

CARTER CENTER MISSION

¶2. (C) The Carter Center is represented by a small group of technical observers that plan to work with the EU EOM to monitor the security of the voting system on election day at CNE headquarters. The group will consist of twelve technical experts, mostly from the State of Georgia, who have familiarity with the voting machines in use - since Georgia uses the same ones in its elections.

¶3. (C) The Carter Center had to scrap more medium-term plans to analyze campaign media coverage, one of the areas of Chavez' policy most criticized by the EU and OAS during the December 2005 National Assembly elections, because of late CNE approval/mission deployment. The CNE previously rejected a Carter Center proposal to evaluate existing -- and largely inadequate -- audits of the electoral registry.

EUROPEAN UNION MISSION

¶4. (C) After receiving an invitation to observe in June, the EU signed its MOU with the CNE on November 15. EU EOM head Monica Frassoni, who has experience in regional electoral observation in Bolivia, has been in Venezuela since November 15 with 10 core team members. Thirty "long-term" observers arrived the week of November 24, to be followed by 100

"short-term" observers by December 1. In total, the EU is planning to have 126 observers on the ground. It will be the largest international EOM, with the most lead time on the ground. The EU EOM does not plan to issue any public statement, absent any egregious problems, until the morning of December 5.

OAS MISSION DEVELOPMENTS

¶ 15. (C) The OAS EOM team is on the ground but with few people. Ambassador Brownfield met with OAS EOM Head and former Uruguayan Ambassador to the OAS Jose Enrique Fischer on November 29 (REF A). Fischer noted that the captahuella issue and adequate opposition representation at the mesas were issues the OAS planned to raise with the CNE. Although Fischer noted that the OAS is talking with the EU Mission, both he and the EU representatives indicated they had only had time for a couple of brief meetings.

¶ 16. (C) OAS Assistant Secretary for Political Affairs Dante Caputo arrives in Caracas on Saturday, December 2. Former Canadian Ambassador to the OAS Paul Durand arrived November 30, although it still is not clear what his role in the EOM will be other than serving as a "close advisor" to Fischer. (Comment: We expect Caputo to be closely following EOM developments and reporting directly to OAS SYG Insulza regarding mission concerns).

¶ 17. (C) The OAS EOM will focus on monitoring the audits remaining for the fingerprint machines, campaign abuses, distribution of election materials, as well as voting day procedures, including electoral violence or intimidation. The OAS plans to individually field 60 observers throughout the country, with 5 additional technical observers in the central

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tally center here in Caracas. The 60 observers will witness the opening and closing of tables, and support the OAS Quick Count. OAS EOM officials however told Canadian DCM Vicken Koundakjian late November 30 that they would be able to field less than 40 observers at polling stations.

¶ 18. (C) EOM technical advisor Elizabeth Spehar noted to PolCons and USOAS officer her belief that the OAS will have adequate access to the CNE's central voting tally center, although she noted it will be physically tight difficult to accommodate many people there. (Comment: The Rosales camp has indicated concern that the CNE may claim that it does not have adequate room in the center for opposition party watchers, a concern which the OAS plans to raise with the CNE. End comment).

¶ 19. (C) Although the OAS EOM agreement with the CNE appears to prohibit the EOM from making public statements without prior CNE vetting (per CNE Resolution 061005-858), Spehar noted that Fischer and Insulza are coordinating very closely. She also indicated that OAS press statements and reporting will occur with Insulza's direct review and guidance. (Comment: Insulza seems to be watching the EOM very closely from afar. End comment).

¶ 110. (C) Asked about last years' unfulfilled OAS recommendations, Spehar said that if the EOM Chief Juan Enrique Fischer agreed, the OAS EOM would discuss these in its post-election press conference and preliminary report. Spehar confirmed that the OAS final EOM report will be presented via Insulza to the OAS Permanent Council.

¶ 111. (SBU) Current level of donor support for the OAS EOM, per the OAS Secretariat:

Dutch:	225,000 USD
Canada:	100,000 CAN
Brazil:	10,000 USD

OAS Regular Fund: 18,000 USD
TOTAL: Approx. 338,000 USD

QUICK COUNTS: TO BE CARRIED OUT BY OAS AND ROSALES

¶12. (C) The OAS said it will include 60 "primary" table samples, and 20-30 "secondary" table samples in its Quick Count. However, the OAS is not yet sure how many secondary samples it will be able to secure because of the time needed to get observers from their primary table to their secondary table; the two will likely be quite far from each other. It is also not clear when the results of the count will be released, since the closing of the mesas is expected to be extended well into the evening. (Comment: The tables are now set to close at 4pm on Sunday, although extensions are common in Venezuela. End Comment). The OAS is using the same Brazilian elections expert for this quick count tabulation it has used in the past for both Nicaragua and Ecuador.

¶13. (C) The Rosales camp will also be conducting two "quick counts," planning to report results from about 200 polling stations when the official tally sheets (actas) are posted. These counts will supplement information available during and immediately after the electoral process from Rosales' poll watchers (testigos). Rosales plans to have party testigos at each of the 33,000 mesas in the country on election day, in each of the 11,000 voting centers. However, we understand that the Rosales campaign is still struggling to deploy both enough trained testigos and the technology capable of quickl0)\dion remain serious challenges for the Rosales camp.

U.S. EMBASSY OBSERVATION

¶14. (C) The embassy is planning to field 15 teams of two people, with roughly 55 people in total including drivers and personnel at the control center in the embassy, to observe

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the elections without formal CNE accreditation. (Comment: No embassies in Caracas have separate accreditation to observe, although a number of third-country embassy personnel do have accreditation to observe via the EU mission). Last year, US Embassy informal observers were able to enter most voting centers without official accreditation with transparent rules of engagement. The embassy teams will be deployed in Caracas and in eight additional states.

DOMESTIC NGO OBSERVERS

¶15. (C) Ojo Electoral, the largest independent domestic observer NGO group, had planned to have 1,000 observers accredited by the CNE. However, post learned November 29 that this number has been cut by the CNE down to 400 observers, severely hindering Ojo's ability to observe. The OAS plans to raise this issue with the CNE directly.

¶16. (C) Radar de los Barrios, a pro-Chavez group with no previous election monitoring experience and no training for election observation, plans to have 50 accredited observers. Radar de los Barrios has a heavy representation of chavistas - despite the leader of the group being from the opposition. The focus of Radar is incidencia publica in the barrios, trying to force the government to resolve local issues.

¶17. (C) Asamblea de Educadores, a pro-opposition group that has made some overtures to the BRV over an education reform bill, has been accredited with 350 observers. The group also has no observer experience, and may not even have 350 regular members. The Asemblea de Educadores was among the organizations that the government loudly decried in 2004 for

having received funding from NED, and despite efforts to change their image still are perceived as opposition. Asemblea de Educadores will be coordinating with Radar de los Barrios.

¶18. (C) Comment: Simplistically, Asemblea represents the opposition, Ojo the middle, and Radar the chavistas. But with Ojo's numbers cut back, and the inclusion of two other organizations who will be unlikely to mount a credible observation effort, the net result is symbolic electoral observation on the part of civil society. End Comment.

POLITICAL OBSERVATION

¶19. Poll (mesa) workers were chosen by lottery by the CNE, a process that has generally appeared to have been fair -- although CNE training of these workers, particularly those associated with the opposition has been very slow. The CNE can appoint selected substitutes in the event that not enough workers are trained.

¶20. Party testigos were accredited for observation after registering via an online application supported by the CNE. OAS' Spehar reports that this process has gone well, noting that the head of the CNE "knows her onions" and appears to be working with the opposition to ensure that their testigos are registered for election day.

COMMENT

¶21. (C) The December 3 Venezuelan Presidential elections would have benefited from a robust international observation effort had the missions begun earlier with strong leadership. Post continues to believe it to be very unlikely that the missions will now be able to mount an effective and comprehensive observation effort given their late arrival. Domestic observers continue to face basic accreditation challenges.

BROWNFIELD